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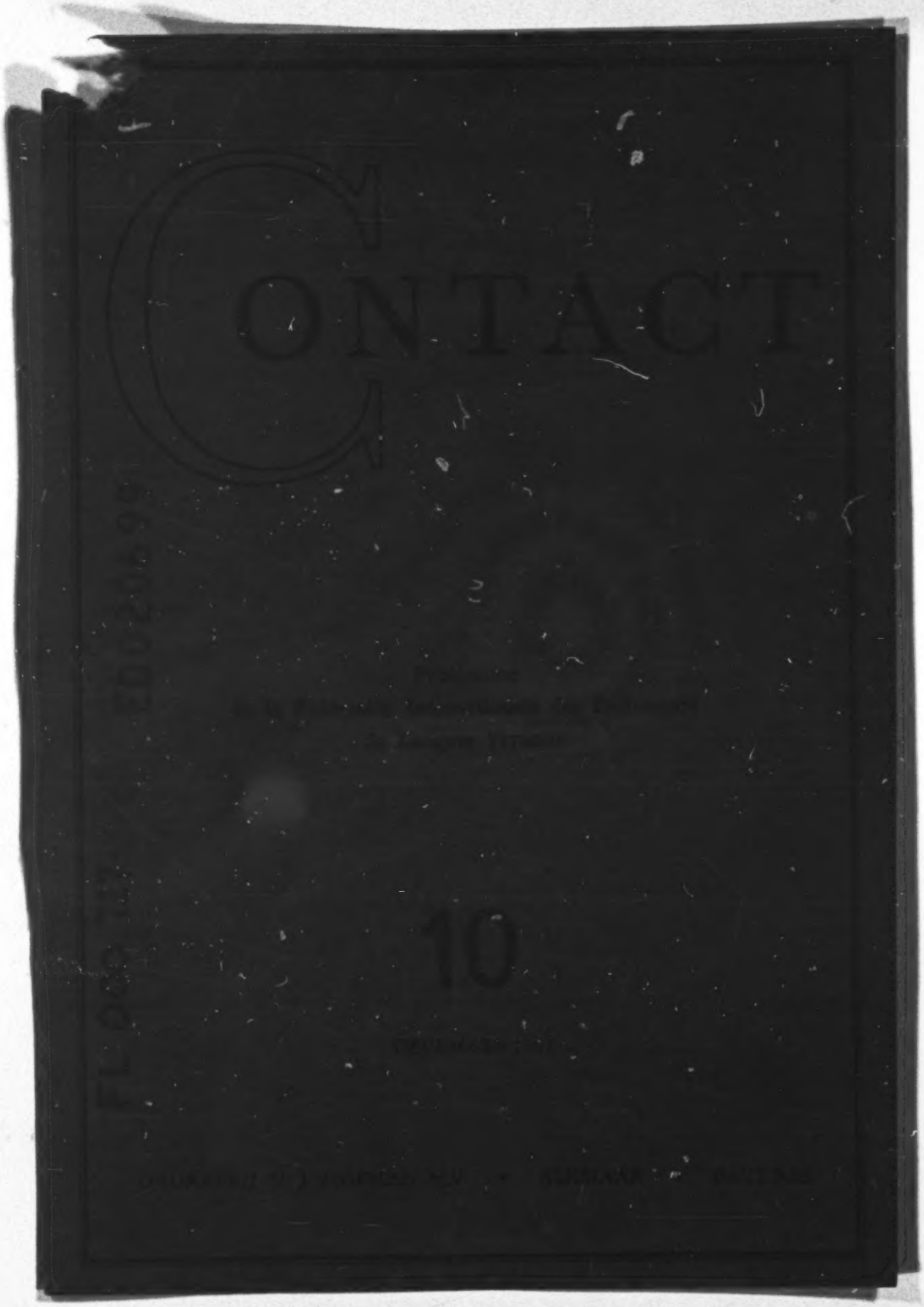
AN INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR, WHOSE PURPOSE IT WAS TO DISCUSS THE STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AIMS, IS REPORTED ON IN THIS ARTICLE. THE THREE PAPERS PRESENTED BY IVAN POLDAUF, VALENTINA ZETLINA, AND JOHN B. CARROLL ARE REVIEWED FOR THEIR DISCUSSIONS ON LINGUISTICS, DIDACTICS, AND PSYCHOLOGY. THE DISCUSSION FOLLOWING THE PRESENTATION OF THE PAPERS IS MENTIONED, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE MADE FOR THE NEED TO CLARIFY THE USE OF SUCH TERMS AS AIMS, MOTIVATION, AND METHODS. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "CONTACT," NUMBER 10, DECEMBER 1967. PAGES 2-5. (SS)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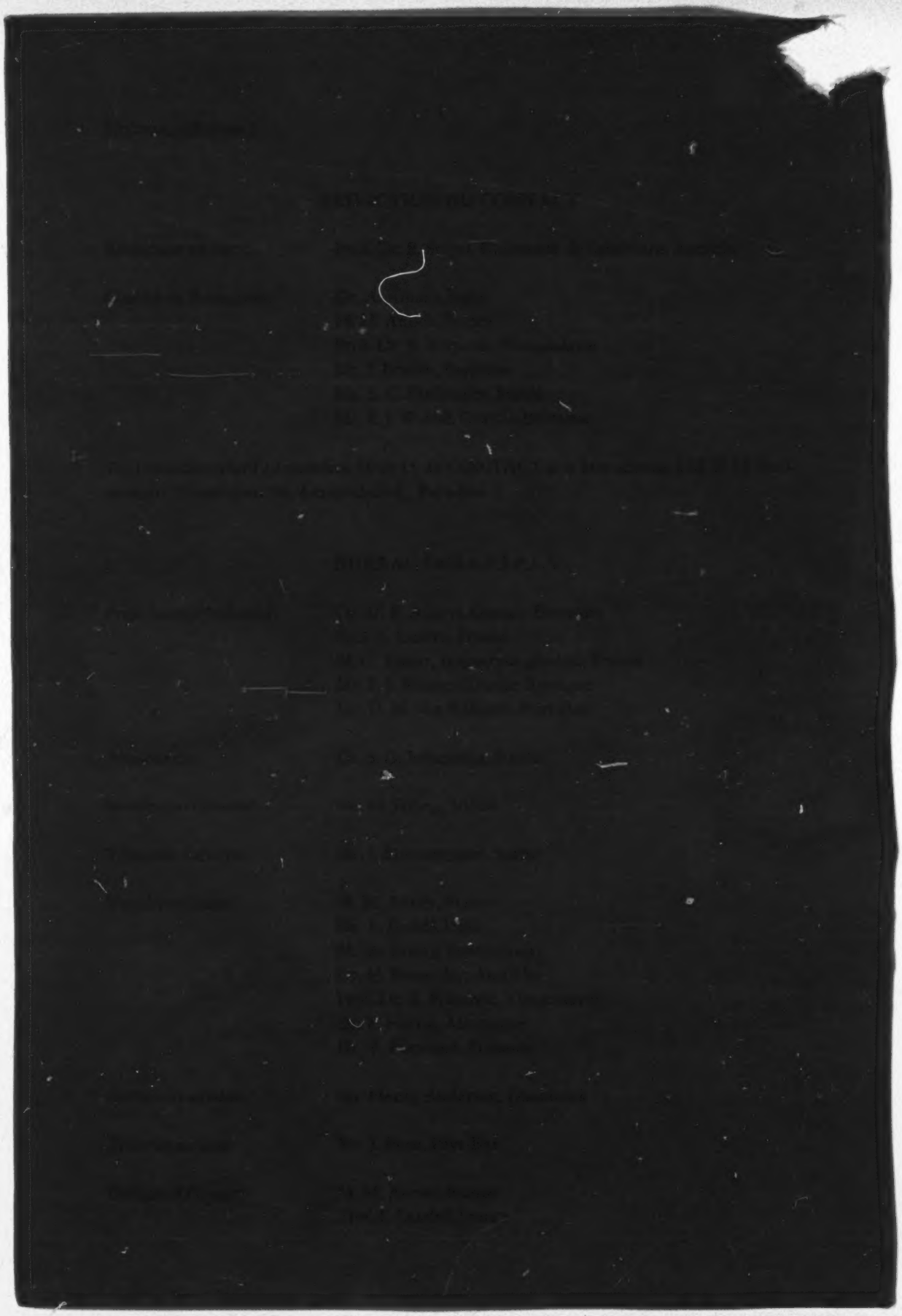

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Prague Seminar on Language Teaching Aims 1967

The F.I.P.L.V. together with its member association Kruh moderních filologu convened to Prague on November 1st - November 3rd 1967 an international seminar whose task it was to discuss *The Structural Differences in Aims of Language Teaching within the Various Layers of the Educational System*. Twenty countries were represented, most of them by member-associations of F.I.P.L.V., but there were also representatives of non-member countries, especially from Eastern Europe. There were altogether 112 participants. The greatest contingent was naturally that of the host country – Czechoslovakia (34), followed by large delegations from France, Italy and the Netherlands. Smaller groups came from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Ireland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Norway, The Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic, Rumania, Sweden, Switzerland, USSR, USA and the United Kingdom. A Swedish delegate represented the Council of Europe which had provided some travel grants for the Seminar. UNESCO, too, had granted subventions for participation in the Seminar. Among the participants were university professors, research workers in education, inspectors and of course many practising teachers.

FL 000 717

The seminar was opened by the president of F.I.P.L.V., Mr. S. G. Johansson, and the president of the Kruh moderních filologu, Professor Bohumil Trnka. The members of the seminar were welcomed at the opening session in the Carolinum, the oldest college of Prague University, by the Czechoslovak Deputy Minister of Education, the Vice-President of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, the Pro-Rector of the Caroline University of Prague and the Secretary General of the Czechoslovak Commission for UNESCO. In the course of the seminar the Minister of Education of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Professor Jiří Hájek, gave a dinner in honour of the members of the Seminar, and the farewell lunch was presided over by Dr. J. Grohman, Chairman of the Czechoslovak Commission for UNESCO.

The theme of the Seminar was introduced by three main papers, the purpose of which was to discuss it from three different points of view, viz. linguistics, didactics and psychology. The first speaker was Professor Ivan Poldauf, Professor of English Language, Prague University. The title of his paper was *Building Up a Structured Complex of Aims*. In his introductory remarks Prof. Poldauf explained why the problem of aims had been chosen for discussion as the general subject at the Seminar. It was due to a growing awareness of the fact that methods of foreign language teaching cannot be responsibly selected, coordinated, further elaborated and applied, unless the teacher is conscious of the aims of the teaching process. This includes awareness of both the aims of a certain stage of instruction as a whole and of the pupils' single attainable achievements, i.e. abilities of varying complexity which are required in the course of the schooling. One should not be hazy when presenting an over-all aim in very general terms of "providing the learner with a new tool of linguistic communication". The formulations we come across are as follows: practical aim, cultural aim, general educational aim (Erziehung und Bildung). In all foreign language teaching we have to do with a complex of aims, which are different owing to the very fact that they occupy different positions in a certain structure or that they belong to structures which are themselves totally different. The discussion of aims should not be limited to a certain age group, but should refer to the various layers of the educational system, from pre-school foreign language learning to adult learning. Professor Poldauf then proceeded to discuss the given problem from the point of view of one aware of the facts of the matter taught, i.e. language, and of the facts or factors concerning the learner, the teacher, their common life in society, the organizers of the teaching (the community), etc.

A different approach was made in the second main paper. It was given by Mme Valentina Zetlina, Senior Research Worker of the Soviet Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, Moscow, USSR. Its title was *The Pedagogical Aims in Teaching Foreign Languages*. Mme Zetlina said that the teaching aims in foreign languages form a complex of practical, educational, cultural and formative objectives. The value of each objective varies according to the level of teaching, i.e. the lower level in elementary schools, a secondary level (lower secondary school) and a higher level (upper secondary school and university students). The level at which the aims may be realized is in direct proportion to the condition under which teaching takes place, i.e. weekly time-table, duration of the course, etc. The content of the teaching is determined by the aims, and the complex of the aims equally determines the methods or system of methods to be used.

The third paper which was read by Dr. John B. Carroll, Senior Research psychologist, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, USA, and bore the title *Psychological Problems of Foreign Language Teaching*, concentrated on the learner and the aims he follows in learning a foreign language. Dr. Carroll therefore outlined the role of the learner: his age, his motivations for language learning, individual differences in "foreign language aptitude". The quality of instruction in relation to teaching aims should be given by the match or fit between the aims of the teacher and the aims of the learner. There should be permanent communication between teacher and pupil concerning aims and concerning levels of accomplishment: the role of testing, confirmation, and rewards and the role of the pupil's learning strategies: the "habit-learning" approach vs. the "cognitive rule-learning" approach.

While no doubt the introductory papers fulfilled their purpose and presented the fundamental outline of the problem of the structural differences in aims of foreign language teaching, the discussion that followed did not meet the expectations. The steering committee of the Seminar, whose chairman was Mr. Hans Jalling, Secretary General of F.I.P.L.V., had altogether 22 interventions at its disposal, sent in beforehand to the organizing committee. Of these more than one third were registered by Czechoslovak participants. These interventions were divided according to their topics into the following groups: those referring to objectives determined by age and grade in school, those referring to partial aims determined by theoretical and practical knowledge, the influence of media on the determination of aims, and aims in the training of foreign language teachers. An equal number of participants joined in the free discussion and spoke about the problem of aims in general or discussed points made in the interventions. There were many interesting points that had been raised in the interventions and in the free discussion. But not all speakers fully understood the main issue of the Seminar. The practising teachers were keen on speaking about some particular problem which was troubling them, but it was often more a point concerning method than a question of aims. On the other hand, those interested in the theoretical issues of language teaching spoke about points which the practising teacher did not consider important. Thus the proceedings of the Seminar re-emphasized an experience made on similar occasions: there are experts in the field of language teaching and language learning that want to discuss fundamental theoretical problems without, of course, losing sight of the practical implications of such discussions of principles, and there are the practising teachers who are eager to exchange experiences on an international level and are primarily interested in those things that are of direct help in their classroom work. Because of this mixture of interests at international conferences of language teachers it is understandable that some members of the Prague seminar openly criticized its proceedings in stating that the Seminar did not come up to their expectations and was therefore disappointing. The organizers of the Seminar must accept some of the blame for not allowing enough time for free discussion of the main topic after the three introductory papers had been read.

In spite of these shortcomings in the discussions the steering committee found it possible to draft some official findings of the Seminar which obtained the approval of its participants. They read as follows:

During the discussion in the Seminar there appeared at times to exist some confusion in the use of the term *aims*. It was indiscriminately used to refer

a) to the individual's reasons for learning a foreign language and

b) to society's reasons for teaching its members a foreign language.

Since psychologists have always used the term *motivation* to refer to the individual's aims, it would seem appropriate to restrict the term *aims* to society's reasons for teaching a foreign language to its members. The task of the teacher would then seem to be the reconciliation of the individual's *motivations* and society's *aims*. The best success in foreign language teaching is to be achieved when there is no conflict between motivation and aims.

There also appeared to be some confusion between *aims* and *methods*. It is most important to maintain a clear-cut distinction between them. Methods refer to the techniques and materials employed by the teacher. Aims have already been defined. Methods can then be considered as the means by which the teacher reconciles *motivation* and *aims* and satisfies them.

A fundamental part of any language teaching operation is to develop what psycholinguists call *competence*. This is the body of the knowledge which underlies the *performance* of any or all of the four skills. The development of competence can best be achieved in the initial stages by a practice of all four performance skills. The initial stages of a course may take place at any level of the educational system, primary, secondary, adult. This applies in particular to the aims of a course in the first foreign language in the non-selective primary or lower secondary school, whilst recognizing here the primacy of the audio-oral skills. Only in the follow-up stages of the teaching of the first foreign language, in particular in the selective secondary schools, will differing aims be reflected in the differential development of the four performance skills.

It is recognized that the introduction of foreign languages inevitably implies the acquainting of the learner with the civilization of another people. As the course progresses the teaching of civilization becomes a more conscious and deliberate part of the course, although the emphasis must always be on the teaching of *language* at all levels.

An interesting and important aspect of language teaching aims emerged during one session devoted to teacher training. It was felt that many present-day courses at university level in modern languages do not sufficiently take into account the needs of the students who intend to enter the teaching profession. This was felt also to be true of some in-service training.

The organizing body of the Seminar, the Kruh moderních filologu, hopes to be able to publish in the near future the three main papers delivered at the Seminar and also a shortened version of the interventions and points of discussion raised at the Seminar that were relevant to the given topic.

While there may be some justified reservations about the actual proceedings of the Seminar, I think there was general satisfaction among the members as to the friendly atmosphere in which they met and could exchange views and experiences outside the lecture hall. This international seminar of foreign language teachers was perhaps the first large gathering at which European language teachers and foreign language teaching experts from East and West met in great number. The many private discussions between the members of the Seminar made everybody realize how much the foreign language teacher can contribute to a better international understanding which, after all, is one of the main and undisputed aims in all foreign language teaching in every country, irrespective of its social system.

Vilém Fried/Prague, CSSR